

dered whether both airplanes had the same altimeter setting dialed in. I wondered if weather had closed in around us. Mostly, I wondered whether Reach was under any kind of radar control at all, and whether he already had called visual to some other controller.

As we climbed, my pilots reported seeing the jet about 500 feet below us and slightly offset to the left. Moments later, I heard from the C-17 for the first time, “Tiger, this is Reach, have you been calling me?”

After both aircraft were well-separated and back on course, a brief discussion brought light to some of the confusion. Reach had not been switched to our frequency, and they depended on a controlling agency too far away to provide flight-following. The pilots in our aircraft had heard and understood the 20-mile traffic call, but had assumed we were in contact with the C-17 and would vector it around us. For our part, all three NFOs agreed we neither had foreseen nor planned for a traffic situation in which we were not in contact with both aircraft.


The lessons learned were humbling as well as crystal clear. Don’t take your controller’s picture for granted. As an airborne command and control platform, we should have been able to steer clear of all traffic. We delayed our decision to alter course because we assumed the control-



SSgt. Jerry Morrison

ler (me) would move the traffic around us.

Situational awareness and procedural knowledge are useless if you fail to take action. I was the only person who knew the whole story; yet, I did not take advantage of the tools I had at my disposal to correct the situation.

We learned to plan for the unexpected. You simply cannot hope the other guy always will be in the right place at the right time; you must have a plan for when others are operating outside the norm. Whether it’s your wingman, your tanker, or an asset under your control, watching out for the next guy may be the best way to keep yourself out of harm’s way. 

Lt. DeJesus flies with VAW-125.

showed that of the 10 DICASS sonobuoys, five were over five years old—one was over six years old. The most probable cause was the aircraft carried five lithium-powered sonobuoys with an expired service life. One of these old buoys had reached the point where in-flight stress caused the lithium batteries to short out and to vent sulfur-dioxide gas.

Handling sonobuoys on the deck and carrying sonobuoys on aircraft, especially helicopters, stresses the lithium-battery package. Leaving sonobuoys on board helicopters or subjecting them to multiple upload/download cycles between flight ops can wear away the plastic coating on the lithium-battery pack. This situation could allow metal-to-metal contact within the sonobuoy tube, causing the battery to short out and vent.

This incident reinforces the importance of properly managing sonobuoy stockpiles. The Retail Ordnance Logistics Management System (ROLMS) is the only authorized ordnance-management system for Navy activities. Sonobuoys are ordnance for management purposes. If used correctly, ROLMS tracks expiration dates and Notices of Ammunition Reclassification (NARs). Proper use of ROLMS will identify expired or restricted-use sonobuoys.

For more information on sonobuoys and ROLMS management, visit the sonobuoy website at <http://sonobuoy.crane.navy.mil>.—George Wolf, assistant program manager for logistics for the sonobuoy program manager.



I am responding to the article “Sonobuoys: Friend or Foe?” in *Approach*, November 2002.

Sonobuoys are electro-mechanical devices used to detect and track submarines. They are a critical component of naval aviation’s antisubmarine-warfare-weapons systems.

Sonobuoys can contain four kinds of batteries: lithium sulfur dioxide (LiSO<sub>2</sub>), lithium chemistry “wafer” or “AA” size, sea-water-activated, or thermal. All battery designs are stable and pose no hazard to personnel or equipment if correctly handled. LiSO<sub>2</sub> batteries, however, can be a hazard if used beyond their shelf life or if damaged. LiSO<sub>2</sub>-powered sonobuoys have a shelf life of five years but can be extended to six years. Under certain conditions, these batteries might vent noxious gases if older than six years. The AN/SSQ-62D (NALC 8W82) DICASS sonobuoy is the only LiSO<sub>2</sub>-powered sonobuoy remaining in the Navy stockpile.

In the November 2002 article, the author discussed an incident on board an SH-60B in which a lithium battery was suspected to be venting. It caused severe distress to a crew member and forced the jettison of all sonobuoys. Analysis of that incident